

TAJIKISTAN

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Capital: Dushanbe
GDP per capita: \$211
Population: 6,200,000

Inflation: 12%
Unemployment: 3.1%
Foreign Direct Investment: \$29,000,000

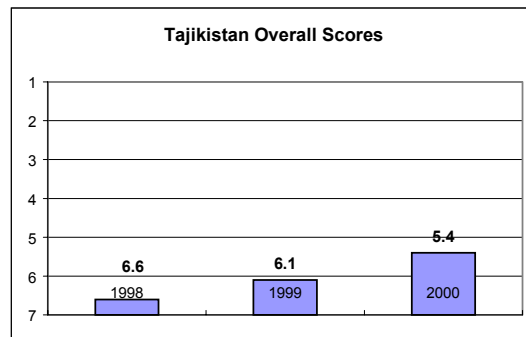
OVERALL RATING: 5.4

NGOs in Tajikistan are undergoing a renaissance. The end of wide-scale civil unrest has transformed the nature of NGOs from service providers and humanitarian aid organizations to lobbying and advocacy organizations working at both the national and local levels. Both the national government and regional authorities are increasingly receptive to recommendations made by non-governmental organizations.

There are more than 600 organizations officially registered in Tajikistan. Most are clustered in the Dushanbe, Khujand and Qur-gon Teppa areas. Not all are non-governmental in the strictest sense (many were established during Soviet times as quasi-governmental unions), and many are currently inactive due to a lack of funds or the political environment.

The security situation has stabilized significantly in the past year, and this stability has promoted the development of NGOs in areas outside of the capital, Dushanbe. NGOs were effective in advocating the implementation of elections in the country. However, the manipulated results of the elections created a situation in which nominally-elected leaders are now more beholden to high-level political forces than they are to society, thereby clearly constraining the potential role of NGOs as agents for public lobbying and advocacy.

The biggest problems facing NGOs in Tajikistan are organizational capacity and financial sustainability. Other than relief and humanitarian work, the civil war and political and social instability that characterized Tajikistan for much of the postwar period largely precluded foreign engagement with the NGO sector. Due to this "late start," NGOs in Tajikistan are only beginning to develop the capacity for sustained sectoral activities. The economy is in shambles following the war, and few businesses are stable enough to think about charity. Furthermore, even donor funds must be handled through outside banks or in cash due to the tenuous nature of the local banking system. Despite having the best tax code in Central Asia, which stipulates broad tax exemptions for NGOs, the law is not implemented appropriately. NGOs with a more political orientation are experiencing harassment from the government.



LEGAL ENVIRONMENT: 5.0

A new NGO law was passed on May 23, 1998. Organizations pushed the legal ministries and participated in the drafting process. The new law ushered in a number of improvements. For example, the number of founders required for an NGO to register was reduced from ten to three.

Unfortunately, implementation of the new law is taking place slowly, but organizations have extensively lobbied to inform the government on these issues. After many seminars and discussions with local NGOs, tax authorities are becoming more acquainted with the work of local organizations and harass NGOs to a lesser extent than in previous years.

As the internal security situation in the country stabilizes, the government is more willing to accept the role of NGOs in society. Stability has given the government new priorities. In a surprising move forward, the Ministry of Justice is consulting with NGOs on the development of further NGO legislation, including a law on non-commercial organizations, and a law on charitable activities and charitable organizations.

Registration costs, averaging around \$500 (but lower for certain categories of NGOs, such as women's groups), are prohibitive, especially for NGOs outside of Dushanbe.

ORGANIZATIONAL CAPACITY: 5.5

Most NGOs were founded by and are controlled by strong personalities. Few have democratic boards or maintain strong membership. The goals of most organizations change with the objectives of international donors. Little progress was noted in this area since last year, although many organizations are striving to better define them-

selves. Often, the capacity and ability of NGOs are correlated directly to their relationship with the government. Many NGO leaders maintain positions in the government. Permanent paid staff is maintained when grant money is available. No coordinating mechanism exists to link NGOs together.

FINANCIAL VIABILITY: 6.0

The relative impoverishment of Tajikistan prevents NGOs from becoming financially independent from international donors. Local donors do not exist. In-kind financial support is sometimes available but is limited to the provision of office space and expert consultation. Usually such in-kind contributions come from the government as

opposed to independent sources. Few NGOs in Tajikistan are financially transparent. The banking system is disorganized at best, making money transfers difficult. Compounding the difficulties, no legal basis exists for NGOs to provide services. Some organizations strive to receive government orders for services, but these opportu-

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nities are also limited. While local financial support is limited, volunteers are abundant and energetic. Organizations promoting women's

issues, youth, refugees, and the handicapped receive an automatic tax exemption, enhancing their financial viability.

ADVOCACY: 5.5

Generally speaking, the government has become more receptive to NGOs and frequently consults with NGOs on specific issues, thereby improving NGOs' influence on policy-making. Government officials are beginning to better understand NGOs and their purpose, and to see the impact of independent organizations. For example, NGO efforts to lobby the government have made an impact in the equal rights sector, where NGOs are writing the government's gender equality strategy for the republic. NGOs have also had some impact on the government's decisions on how to carry out the election, although they remained silent when the disappointing election results were announced. Self-censorship still exists to some extent - most organizations refrain from strongly

criticizing the government. NGOs are also playing a more active role in public councils recently convened throughout the country. NGO advocacy efforts remain consolidated at the local, and to a lesser degree, the regional levels.

Competition for international donor funding hinders NGOs' ability to collaborate on a large-scale level, although a few issue-based coalitions exist in the areas of health, ecology, and legal issues. In addition, coalitions were active during this year's presidential and parliamentary elections. Dilapidated and decaying communications infrastructure inhibits effective communication between organizations and thus further limits the possibilities for coalition building.

SERVICE PROVISION: 5.5

The dramatic and urgent situation caused by the civil war required that NGOs provide services and humanitarian assistance to those most in need. Due to these unique circumstances, Tajikistani NGOs are well versed in service provision. While such assistance is still needed, it is not profitable and does not encourage the financial sustainability of local NGOs. The poor economic climate and banking infrastructure also

severely limit the ability of NGOs to effectively engage in such activities.

There remains a lack of entrepreneurship and innovation among projects. Many NGOs replicate each other's projects because they know such projects are acceptable to the donor community. At the same time, NGOs are increasingly examining the real needs of the community.

INFRASTRUCTURE: 5.0

NGO support centers exist throughout the country and their numbers are expected to increase during the next year. Overall, there has been an increase in both the quality and the quantity of trainings developed by and delivered to NGOs. Well-trained cadres of Tajik-speaking trainers exist and are expanding their activities into the rural areas of the country.

Efforts to build coalitions exist. A nationwide association of twelve NGOs serving over 40,000 disabled persons was established. Other associations and coalitions include the Association of Medical NGOs; a coalition of refugee organizations; and the Coalition of Youth NGOs.

PUBLIC IMAGE: 5.0

Local media entities have increased the broadcast time devoted to the work of NGOs, thereby improving the public image of local organizations. Little national media attention, however, is devoted to NGOs. Many organizations favored by the government have received extensive attention from the national media, although the accuracy of the coverage is questionable because these organizations do not always perform the work reported. A newspaper published by NGOs and sponsored by a series of international donors continues to highlight

the successes of NGOs and is available for public consumption.

Some rural NGOs are also becoming better known due to the services they provide. While a few organizations have a solid community base for their activities, many are not grassroots oriented; rather, their operations lie behind the capabilities of a single individual. Due to this limited constituency base, many NGOs are not accessible to the general public.